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TALKING BACK: THE ONEIDA LANGUAGE AND FOLKLORE PROJECT, 1938-1941*

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The Oneida Language and Folklore Project, originated by Professor Morris Swadesh at the University of Wisconsin and supported by the Works Progress Administration's Federal Writers' Project, had a far-reaching impact on scholarly interest in Iroquoian linguistics and on Indian existence. Combining scientific research with the social needs of an Indian community, the project, which promoted the writing of the Oneida language, spawned future work in applied linguistics among the Iroquois, helped develop an orthography and a hymnal, and, most significantly, contributed to the preservation of tribal folklore and history. The project also furthered Oneida community cooperation and pride and created employment for Indians during the economic crisis of the Great Depression. Moreover, initiated at a time when financial support for research from private foundation and university sources was limited, the Oneida Language and Folklore Project, as well as other similar WPA experiments, infused funds needed by academia for scholarly endeavors.

The Great Depression was particularly distressing for the Oneida Indian community in Wisconsin. They had barely endured and survived the upheaval brought on by the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887. Before this legislation, the Oneidas had controlled a reservation of 65,436 acres; by the time of the New Deal, they owned collectively less than ninety acres with approximately 700 acres held in individual allotments.¹ The act provided that each family be en-

titled to an allotment of land, the amount dependent upon the size of the family. The land so allotted was held in trust for a period of twenty-five years after which, upon certification of competency, the patentee received title. For the Oneidas the trust period ended in 1917, and, within a few years, over 1,500 allotments were made and lost.² Land speculators, often in collusion with corrupt Indian agents, and, on some occasions, assisted by Oneida leaders, set about separating the allottees from their allotment. The largely uneducated Oneidas were encouraged to fall into debt by borrowing money or mortgaging their homesteads to buy musical instruments, carriages, or unneeded livestock. Besides the seductive inducements of mail order house catalogs, some swindlers used more direct means to gain land title. In some cases speculators took the families to town and while the wife shopped, the husband drank and signed the papers of transfer. Most speculators did not have to resort to such nefarious schemes; they merely had to wait for the governmental processes to take their course. Most Oneida land under allotment was subject to local property taxes, resulting in new and impossible burdens, foreclosures, and subsequent tax sales of property.³

By 1930 the Oneidas were virtually a landless people. To survive, Oneidas worked as laborers in the mills at Green Bay and DePere or as hired hands on farms in the surrounding communities. Many left Oneida to look for work in Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis. Although these migrations separated families and created new divisions, the emigrés never fully severed their ties to the shrinking community. World War I accelerated the out-migration as Oneidas sought jobs in the expanding war industries or enlisted in the army. One hundred and fifty

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¹ J. P. Kinney, *A Continent Lost—A Civilization Won: Indian and Tenure in America* (Baltimore, 1937), pp. 355-356; Harry W. Baschert, "Historical Changes in the Kinship System of the Oneida Indians" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1952), p. 218; Jack Campisi, "Ethnic Identity and Boundary Maintenance in Three Oneida Communities" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York, Albany, 1974), p. 158.

² J. M. Stewart (Director of Lands) Memorandum to Commissioner John Collier Aug. 11, 1937, BIA Central Files, 1907-1939, #51350-1934-1752-Tomah, Record Group 75, National Archives.

³ Baschert, "Historical Changes in the Kinship System," p. 218. Interviews (conducted by Laurence M. Hauptman) of Jim Schryter, Oct. 20, 1978, Anderson Cornelius, Oct. 21, 1978, Oneida, Wisconsin. Jack Campisi, Field Notes at Oneida, 1972.

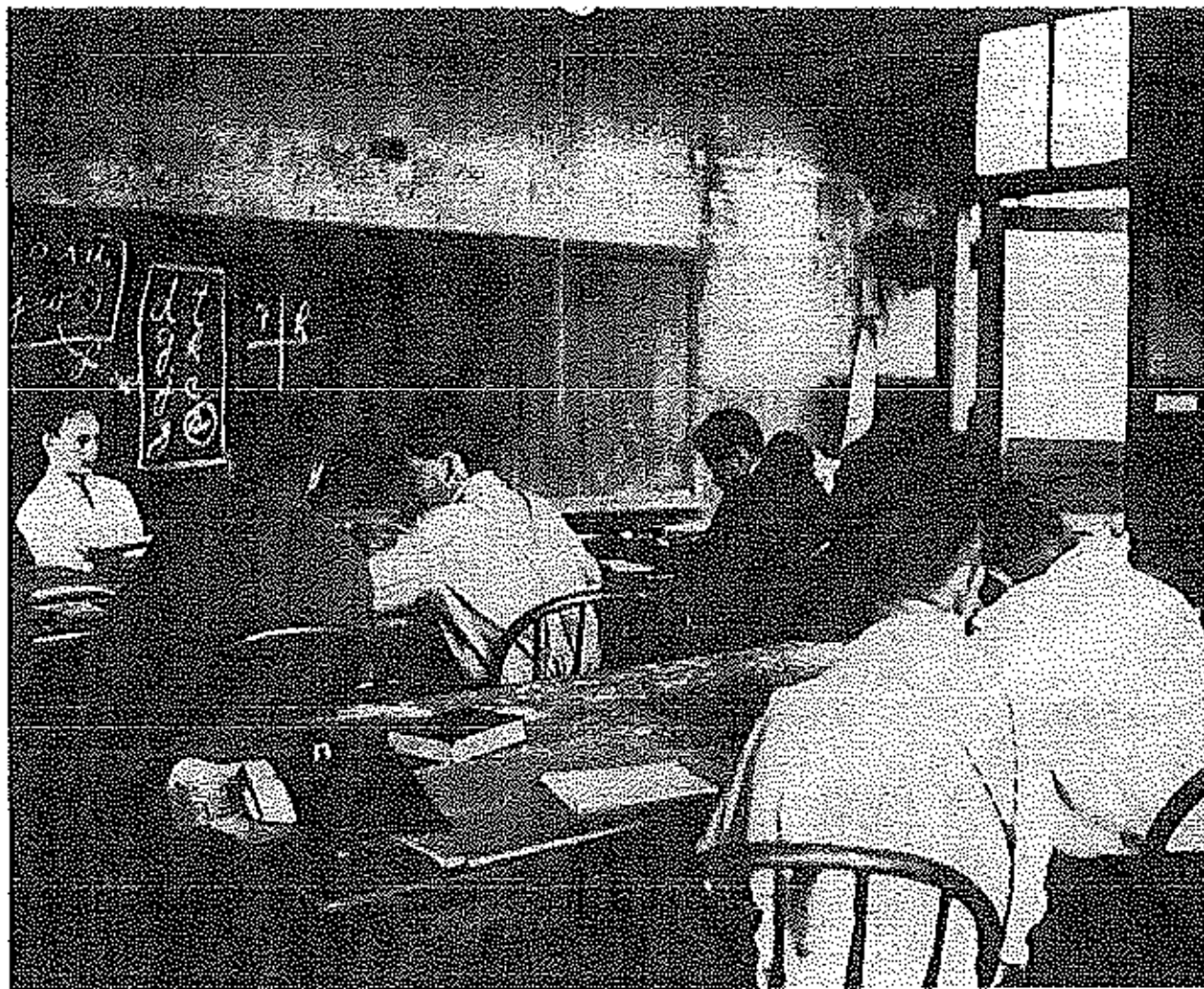


FIG. 1. Floyd Lounsbury's Class. Oneida Language and Folklore Project. Oneida Wisconsin. 1939. Floyd Lounsbury Seated on Left in Front of Chalkboard. Photograph by Robert Ritzenthaler. Ritzenthaler Collection Courtesy of the Milwaukee Public Museum.

Oncidas saw military service, many in France. For these returning veterans and their laboring counterparts, there was little incentive to return to the economically depressed and largely landless community of Oneida.⁴

Even before the Great Depression, economic conditions at Oneida were abysmal. One prominent Oneida insisted, before the Senate Indian Affairs Subcommittee in July, 1929, that the "people are all poor and have no money with which to live." He added that the Indians "are losing their homes and many are destitute on account of taxation and the high cost of liv-

ing."⁵ The Senate Subcommittee later heard testimony from the Superintendent at the Keshena Agency who indicated that the Oncidas had only 15-20 small parcels of land left.⁶ Racial discrimination also impeded Oneida economic and educational progress. The narrow-minded Superintendent of the Tomah Indian School, one with a large Oneida student body, outlined his analysis of the problems of educating Indians in 1929: "Of course some are poverty stricken due to their own improvidence. I don't blame them any, they're Indians, and that's their way."⁷

⁴ Cara E. Richards, *The Oneida People* (Phoenix, 1974), pp. 71-78. By 1932, there were 3,131 Oneidas; only 1,415 lived at Oneida and environs. United States Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Statistical Report*, Keshena Agency, Oneida Reservation, 1932, p. 15, found in Annual Reports from the Indian Agencies in Wisconsin, 1909-1939, Microfilm Reel #5, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

⁵ United States Congress, Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Indian Affairs. *Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 79 and S. Res. 308: Survey of Conditions of the Indians of the U.S. 71st Cong., 1st sess.* (Washington, D.C., 1930), V, 1930.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1932.

⁷ W. F. Dickens to Senator Robert LaFollette, Jr., Senator Robert LaFollette, Jr., MSS., Box 412, Series C, File: Indian Affairs, July 1-9, 1929, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

With the onset of the Great Depression, the Oneidas' problems went from bad to worse. Anthropologist Robert Ritzenthaler has described the changes:⁸

. . . In the ensuing years many of the people lost the jobs they had held in nearby towns. Many of the Oneidas scattered over state and country also lost their jobs and had no chance but to return to the only homes they knew, Oneida. The influx of the jobless tended to make the home problems more acute; meager resources were rapidly dissipated to a depression subsistence. The drop in prices of farm produce also had its effect as this was the only source of income for some. By this time the landholdings had dwindled to an average of ten acres per family which made increased production impossible. A state survey showed that at least eighty acres of land in that area was necessary for economically sustaining a farm. . . .

By 1930, 77 percent of these Indians were receiving public assistance.⁹ The Bureau in the early 1930s, in order to alleviate starvation, sent 1500 Navajo sheep to Oneida. Unfortunately, the sheep were too scrawny, having little meat on them after butchering. Other relief efforts included the sending of Red Cross flour as well as surplus army clothing.¹⁰ Despite these efforts, conditions worsened, and, by the mid-1930s, the Superintendent of the Keshena Indian Agency appealed to Washington on their behalf claiming he knew "of no condition within this area that is in such dire need of assistance."¹¹

The failure of the United States government to deal effectively with these massive problems worked to reinforce Oneida suspicion of Washington Indian policymakers. The Oneidas could point to a long line of government ineptness and corruption in their dealings with the non-Indian world: their emigration westward from New York; the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887; corrupt Indian agents who failed to protect them from land swindlers and timber strippers; the non-recognition of Oneida land claims; as well as many other examples of overall incompetence. This historic failure in carrying out the trust relationship with these Indians provoked Oneida ire and allowed for Indian politicians, some honest, others dishonest, to arise advocating their own unique solutions to thorny problems. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, four separate political groups, each with large follow-

ings, vied for power at Oneida. The bitterness and resulting recriminations caused by the allotment policy combined with the historic divisions within the tribe to produce increased factionalized political behavior. Consequently, measures needed for tribal relief, reform, and economic development were postponed and became subordinate to the ambitions of self-proclaimed headchiefs.¹²

Although considerably more privileged than Indian America, the academic world of the university also felt the full effect of the Great Depression. Scholars had made a major effort to develop the study of native languages through the founding of the Linguistic Society of America in 1924, an organization whose objectives included rescuing disappearing languages.¹³ These efforts were augmented in 1927 by the formation of the Committee on American Native Languages of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) headed by Franz Boas. Funded by the ACLS and the Carnegie Corporation, the committee sponsored field research and publication on native American languages, spending \$200,000 in the course of ten years. Nevertheless by 1937, the depression had virtually wiped out all sources of private funding.¹⁴

That same year, Morris Swadesh joined the faculty of the University of Wisconsin. He had spent the previous six years at Yale University as a research assistant and later associate of Edward Sapir and had shown a special interest and aptitude for research on American Indian languages.¹⁵ Wisconsin provided a particularly fertile setting for work with a large number of language groups and Swadesh was soon involved with Chippewa, Menominee and Potawatomi. For its part, the university began an aggressive effort to secure federal government subsidies in the form of WPA projects to help meet its financial needs. It submitted twenty proposals between March, 1938 and February, 1939, nineteen of which were funded, including one for ". . . a Phonetic Vocabulary of the Oneida Indian Language and the accumulation of native folk lore" to be directed by Swadesh. Starting with seed money in the form of an emergency allotment of \$200 in July, 1938, the Project was granted an appropriation of

¹² Laurence M. Hauptman, *The Iroquois and the New Deal*, forthcoming.

¹³ Quoted in Dell Hymes, "Morris Swadesh: From the First Yale School to World Prehistory," in *The Origin and Diversification of Language*, Joel Sherzer, ed. (Chicago, 1967), p. 230.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 241. See also the introduction in C. F. Voegelin and Z. S. Harris, eds., "Index to the Franz Boas Collection of Materials for American Linguistics," *Language Monograph #22*, supplement to *Language: Journal of the Linguistic Society of America*, 21 (July-Sept., 1945): p. 5.

¹⁵ Hymes, "Morris Swadesh . . .", pp. 230-244. Swadesh's dissertation was on the Nootka language. "The Internal Economy of the Nootka World: A Semantic Study of Word Structure in a Polysynthetic Language" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1935).

⁸ Robert Ritzenthaler, "The Oneida Indians of Wisconsin," *Bulletin of the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee* 19 (Nov., 1950): pp. 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁰ Interview (conducted by Laurence M. Hauptman) of Anderson Cornelius, Oct. 20, 1978; Robert Ritzenthaler, "The Cultural History of the Wisconsin Oneidas" (Unpublished M. A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1940), pp. 10-11; Alfred W. Briggs (Wisconsin Director of Unemployment Relief) to John Collier, May 5, 1934, BIA Central Files, 1907-1939, #14504-1934-723-Keshena, Record Group 75, National Archives.

¹¹ Ralph Frodenberg to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 18, 1935, BIA Central Files, 1907-1939, #803-1934-310-Keshena, Record Group 75, National Archives.

\$10,728 in December to begin operations at Oneida in January, 1939.¹⁶

Swadesh began making arrangements for the research in the fall of 1938; however, his plans were soon radically changed. Late in 1938 he was informed that his contract at the University of Wisconsin would not be renewed. Almost concurrently, he was offered a position by Mexico to head that government's Tarascan literacy project. Committed to the Oneida project but having little desire to remain to fulfill the last semester of his contract and thus lose the Mexican position, Swadesh found himself trapped. His only way out of the predicament was to find a suitable replacement to direct the project. He selected Floyd Lounsbury as his assistant and later project director.¹⁷

Lounsbury, a twenty-five year old undergraduate student from Waukesha, Wisconsin, was a mathematics major in his senior year. He had previously taken courses in structural linguistics from Professor Freeman Twadell as well as courses in philology, and had audited Swadesh's courses on Indian languages and field methods. When Swadesh, almost in passing, offered him the Oneida position, Lounsbury jumped at the opportunity. Swadesh arranged for a group of Oneidas to come to Madison to meet with him and his new assistant and to lay the groundwork for the research. The meeting went well and Lounsbury made arrangements to move to Oneida while studying what little he could find on Iroquoian languages, especially two groundbreaking articles by Franz Boas and Marius Barbeau.¹⁸

The Oneida Language and Folklore Project began formally in January, 1939, and continued for nineteen months. Approximately two dozen Oneidas were put in a two-week training session with the understanding that the best writers of the language would be selected at the end of the period. The Oneidas were amenable to the idea, in part because most were transferred from outdoor WPA projects during the cold winter.¹⁹ Others reflected the sentiments of one participant:

It's quite funny, having a white man come here and teach us how to write our own language. But it's interesting. And I think it will be a good thing for the tribe. My little grandson

here can't speak any Oneida. We older people don't like to see them forget all about their heritage.²⁰

The project personnel were informed that their primary aim was to write texts in their native language. They would meet weekdays for about eight hours a day and would receive fifty cents an hour—about \$45 a month. This was approximately the same rate paid by other WPA "white-collar" projects.²¹

One reason for the success of the project can be attributed to the active support and participation by one of the principal political leaders of the community, Oscar Archiquette. He was the youngest and the most enthusiastic Oneida connected with the project, a shrewd politician, fluent speaker, and skilled orator. Of all the speakers in the project, he was the brightest, the only one able to grasp the arbitrariness of the linguistic system and to understand the rules and apply them.²²

Oneida interest in the project became enthusiastic support as they became acquainted with Lounsbury. He provided insights into the structure of the language, rules to guide the selection of the most effective comparisons, techniques to demark morpheme boundaries and an orthography that enabled the participants to record the rich folklore of the community. Ideas that existed only in the Oneida's subconscious were verbalized as the sophistication of the language was gradually revealed.²³ When Lounsbury insisted that their language contained voiceless vowels, the Oneidas responded by maintaining that "we've been speaking this language all our lives and we've never realized we did this."²⁴ Out of these sessions, Lounsbury developed a 19-character orthography which the Oneidas practiced writing. The training sessions, with Swadesh initially in attendance, first met in the parish hall of the Methodist Church in DePere but was soon moved to the north wing of the Episcopal Church at Oneida because of heating problems. After an introductory training period, Lounsbury reduced the class to thirteen. Eight speakers were to remain as participants for the entire 19 months.²⁵

Work on the orthography was the first order of business and this took the immediate attention of the group. The class was broken up into small groups and given work sheets to study. Lounsbury then conducted

¹⁶ "Synopsis of the University of Wisconsin—WPA Social Research Program, March 1938 to February, 1939," Clarence A. Dykstra MSS., General Correspondence Files, 1938-1939, Series no. 4/15/1, Box 40, File: WPA, University of Wisconsin Archives, Madison.

¹⁷ Hymes, "Morris Swadesh," p. 243-244.

¹⁸ Interview (conducted by Laurence M. Hauptman and Jack Campisi) of Floyd Lounsbury, Nov. 16, 1978, Yale University; Franz Boas, "Notes on the Iroquoian Language," in *Putnam Anniversary Volume: Anthropological Essays Presented to F. W. Putnam* (New York, 1909), pp. 427-460; Marius Barbeau, "Classification of Iroquoian Radicals with Subjective Pronominal Prefixes," *Anthropological Series 7. Memoirs of the Canadian Geological Survey 46* (Ottawa, 1915).

¹⁹ Interview (conducted by Laurence M. Hauptman) of David Skenandore, Oct. 22, 1978, DePere, Wisconsin. Skenandore is the last surviving Oneida participant in the project.

²⁰ "Tribal Myths Will Be Saved," *Milwaukee Journal*, Jan., 1939, found in Robert Ritzenthaler Field Notes, Milwaukee Public Museum.

²¹ Interview of Floyd Lounsbury, Nov. 16, 1978. For a comparison with other WPA "white-collar" projects among Indians, see Laurence M. Hauptman, "The Iroquois School of Art: Arthur C. Parker and the Seneca Arts Project, 1935-1941," *New York History* 60 (July, 1979); pp. 282-312.

²² Interview of Floyd Lounsbury, Nov. 16, 1978.

²³ "Rules for Separating Prefixes from Body of a Word," Oneida Language and Folklore Project handout sheet (original in Floyd Lounsbury's possession).

²⁴ Quoted in "Tribal Myths Will Be Saved."

²⁵ Interview of Floyd Lounsbury, Nov. 16, 1978.

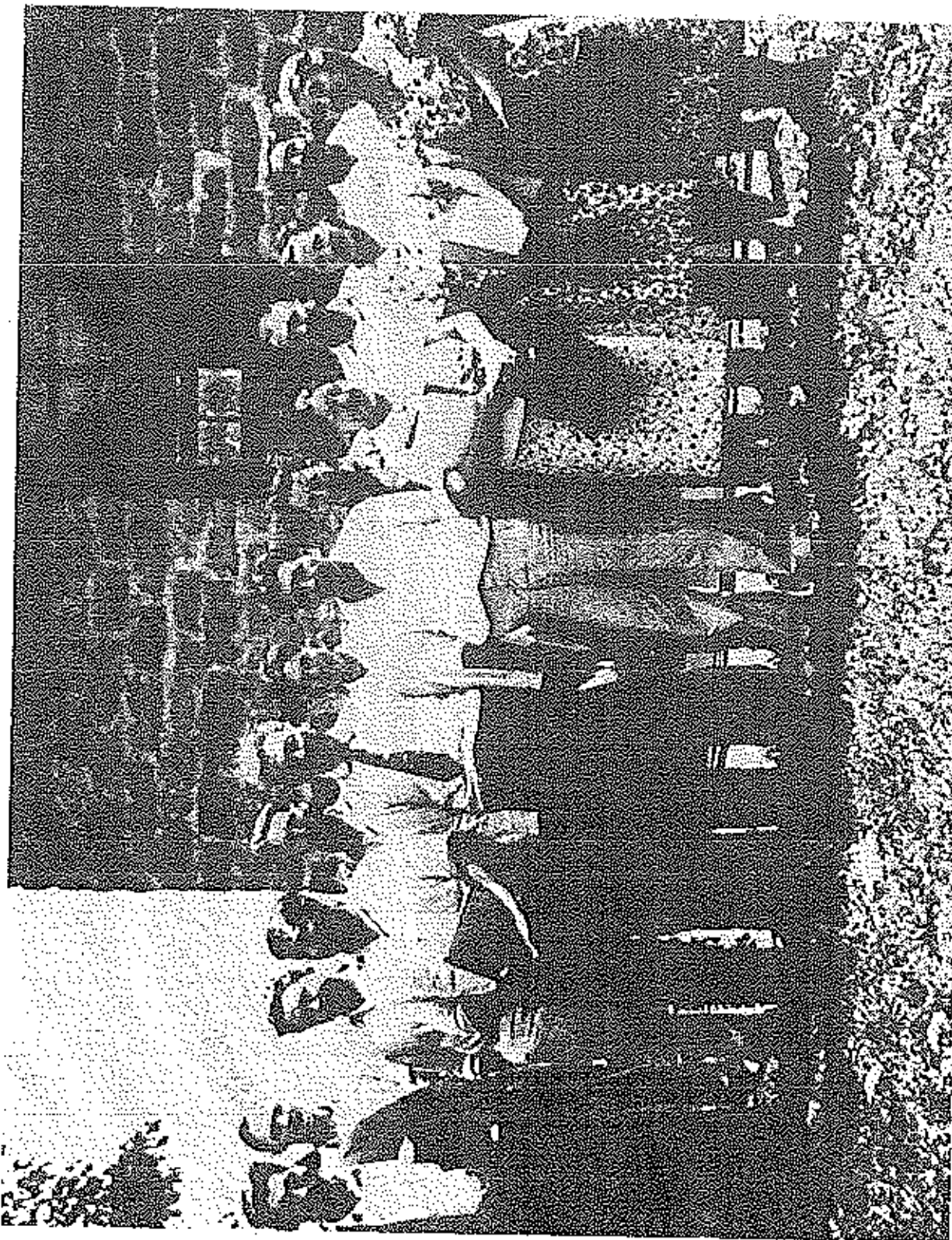


FIG. 2. Oneida Language and Folklore Project Participants, Oneida, Wisconsin, 1939. Left to Right: David Skenandore, Floyd Lounsbury, Lawrence Kerstetter, Tillie Baird, John Skenandore, Rachel Smith Miller, Oscar Archibquette, Ida Blackhawk, Andrew Beechires, Guy Elm, Eddie Metoxen, Emerson King, Alec Metoxen, Stadler King. Photograph by Robert Ritzenthaler. Ritzenthaler Collection Courtesy of the Milwaukee Public Museum.

language drills, generally in the morning. Those who achieved less than a 50 percent accuracy rate received additional instruction and further testing. After two and a half days, the group achieved a 98 percent accuracy in their ability to write Oneida. As soon as this training was completed Oneidas went into the community to collect stories, usually varying in length from a paragraph to a page. The stories then were typed in triplicate, forty words to the page, by the WPA office in Green Bay. One of the copies was returned to the person who had transcribed it to be checked for errors. To this copy, the writer then added an interlinear literal translation. The individual also provided a free translation on a separate page which was typed and included with the other work.²⁶

The collection and preservation of the stories represented the major achievement of the project. The subjects ranged from lists of place names to aspects of Oneida culture, including Iroquois animal symbolism, herbalism, games, proper names, and recipes; ghost and trickster stories; Indian school experiences; major turning points in Oneida history such as the American Revolution, removal and resettlement in Wisconsin and the Kansas Claim; and reactions to contemporary events including the New Deal. Taken together, they are a chronicle of a tribe's history and the failure of successive United States government Indian policies.

Community involvement in the collection of the stories was apparent from the beginning. Skits employing the stories were put on for the community's enjoyment. Nearly every adult member of the community contributed a story to the project. Elders recalled special recipes for many different varieties of Iroquois corn soup, cracked dried corn, pumpkins and Indian hominy.²⁷ Others told of Indian salves that were good for sore throats, rheumatism, and sprains.²⁸ Many of the stories were devoted to moral lessons discouraging Indian laziness, blind obedience, and greed, and promoting family responsibilities to the elderly.²⁹

Josephine Webster, an old Oneida lacemaker, recalled with pride how a group of women philanthropists from New York City introduced this skill among

the tribe in 1898. By the second decade of the twentieth century, 60 to 100 Oneida women were producing bobbin pillow laces, tablecloths, and handkerchiefs which the New York women marketed until their organization folded in 1926.³⁰

Oneida life at Indian schools received much attention in the stories. The lasting pride that Oneidas experienced in attending these institutions is in stark contrast to the sobering reality of the detribalization process occurring at the schools. One of the early stories collected reveals the assimilationist teachings at the old Oneida Indian school at the turn of the century. Jonas Elm insisted: "I didn't learn anything during that time. As a matter of fact I know less than when I first got there."³¹ Others recalled endearingly the other side of these schools. Moses Elm emphasized the great Oneida athletes at Carlisle, who made the school a football powerhouse.³² Albert Webster described life at Hampton Institute where the Oneidas first became versed in Gospel music, later becoming well-known on Wisconsin radio.³³ Ida Blackhawk, who attended Lincoln and Hampton Institutes as well as Carlisle recalled her training in home economics and domestic science as well as the "outing system" at these schools that placed Indians in the homes of the "best wealthy white people" to learn by example.³⁴

Others had more chilling stories to tell. The level of education at the boarding schools was revealed by a student who ran away from Carlisle after ten months.³⁵

I was 17 years old when I went to Carlyle [sic] Indian School, I was in the 3rd grade when I went. I had been going to school at Aswabenon here, they put me in 2nd grade when I got there. I went to school 10 months then I ran away, I was caught in Pittsburgh and I ran away again.

Oscar Archiquette recalled his experiences at Flan-dreau in South Dakota, a place he was sent as a fifth grade student at the age of 15. Shortly after his arrival, he was accused of writing his name in a dictionary

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Mrs. Tom Elm to Tillie Baird, "Home Made Hominy," undated, T-16; Nelson B. Cornelius's wife to Dennison Hill, untitled, no date, D-89; Oscar Archiquette, untitled, Feb. 10, 1939, Z-32; Elizabeth Webster (Alisgwetgo) to David Skandore, "Corn Soup," Feb. 20, 1939, V-1, Story Book, Oneida Language and Folklore Project. The three books of stories are presently on file in the Oneida Language Project office on the second floor of the Sacred Heart Seminary at Oneida, Wisconsin. (Hereafter cited as OLFPB).

²⁸ Elizabeth Huff to Tillie Baird, "Indian Salve," undated, T-32; Tillie Baird, "Medicine for Sprains," undated, T-42; Tillie Baird, "Yellow Salve or Simon Anton Salve," undated, T-20, OLFPB.

²⁹ Ida Blackhawk to Floyd Lounsbury, untitled, undated, Z-18; Ida Blackhawk "A Lazy Man," undated, Z-34; Lomis King to Guy Elm, "Man and Wife," undated, G-4, OLFPB.

³⁰ Josephine Webster to Tillie Baird, "Lace Work," Undated, T-53, OLFPB. For the origins of Oneida lacemaking, see Kate L. Duncan, "American Indian Lace Making," *American Indian Art* 5 (Summer 1980): pp. 28-35, 80.

³¹ Jonas Elm to Morris Swadesh translated by Guy Elm, untitled, ?, 1938, Z-10 OLFPB.

³² Moses Elm to Guy Elm, "Football," Sept. 22, 1939, G-64, OLFPB. Moses Elm recalled the famous athletic careers of Oneidas at Carlisle of Jonas Metoxen, Chauncey Archiquette and Martin Wheelock.

³³ Albert Webster to Guy Elm, "Jubilee Singers," June 16, 1939, G-56, OLFPB.

³⁴ Ida Blackhawk, "When I Went to School," Sept. 28, 1939, S-79, OLFPB.

³⁵ Martin Hill to Oscar Archiquette, "I Went to Carlyle (sic) Penn.," Sept. 29, 1939, O-62, OLFPB.

thought to be the property of the school. Although he protested that the book was his—a gift from a sister—he was severely punished. Reacting to the unfortunate situation, Archiquette punched the principal and was summarily dismissed.³⁶

In a lighter and more carefree manner, Andrew Beechtree, in one story using inversion as a device, poked fun at the oft-held white belief that the Indians were one of the lost tribes of Israel. Beechtree insisted that the lands south of Lake Ontario contained the Garden of Eden, that it was great apple country and that the Jews were descendants of the Iroquois, not the reverse.³⁷ Ida Blackhawk told a story about an Oneida and a white who were talking and suddenly a third man passed by. The white man, startled, insisted that the man looked like the devil. The Oneida man responded: "I don't know the devil."³⁸

The project's stories also recorded the concerns and aspirations of contemporary Oneidas of the 1930's. "Wilkie Fat" Skenandore, former tribal political leader, told Beechtree that the Oneida land claims issue must be settled, indicating to him that the United States government was obligated to help the Indians for their support in the American Revolution.³⁹ Another Oneida recalled how he and other Indians had been victimized by Minnie Kellogg, an Oneida who convinced many Iroquois that they would not share in any claims settlement unless they paid dues to her and her organization.⁴⁰ In another story Archiquette described the impact of the Indian Reorganization Act on the Oneida community.⁴¹

Through this new act for the Indians, the Government is buying land what we lost to the white people and there is a revolving fund set up for us, where we can borrow money to buy stock and farm implements . . . there are a few Indians now living on this land, so it is very pleasing to see that we will all own homes again some day.

The project was troubled with only one of the major problems facing other WPA programs: how to justify its existence to congressional critics. Senator Alexander Wiley, the Republican from Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, and a constant critic of the WPA, saw the project as a financial boondoggle wasting the taxpayer's money.⁴² In response, the WPA published sev-

eral articles containing promotional photographs in Milwaukee newspapers justifying the project. The project's funding came to an end during the summer of 1940, but not as a result of Wiley's attacks.⁴³ The fall of France increased national concern for preparedness and spurred employment, reducing the need for and interest in relief projects.

The project resulted in three major contributions. Most importantly, there was the legacy of several thousand pages of text, written in Oneida with English translations. Beyond their obvious value as folklore, these stories provide an insight into Oneida values, adjustments, and feelings regarding the hundred years of trauma since their emigration from New York. The project's storybooks, virtually untapped by ethnohistorians, are one of the better all-Indian archival repositories in the United States describing Indian life of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was quite different from other WPA Federal Writers' Projects. Grant Foreman's WPA Indian-Pioneer History of Oklahoma had whites interviewing Indians; moreover, whites interviewed blacks in accumulating the famous WPA ex-slave narratives. At Oneida, Indians listened to other Oneidas, while learning to write their language.⁴⁴

A second result, of a more functional nature from the standpoint of the community, was the compilation of an Oneida hymnal. Ever since the mid-eighteenth century, the Oneidas had been writing and singing Christian hymns, sometimes translating English verse to Oneida, other times writing new verse for English melodies and occasionally writing both words and music. Over time, they had developed a distinctive style of singing and had organized a number of choirs. The project brought together more than a hundred of these hymns. The original manuscript of the hymnal written in blank notebooks obtained from a 5 & 10 cent store in Green Bay had proved to be an immediate sensation and was copied by project participants for other community members. Nevertheless, the demand far exceeded the scribes' ability to copy. The new edition of the hymnal had been revised by Lounsbury, typed on mimeographed stencils, run off at the university, and sent to the WPA bookbinding project at Waupaca where it remained unpublished because of the cessation of the project. Oscar Archiquette, who was largely responsible for the transliteration of the hymnal into the new orthography, retrieved the manuscript in 1941. To raise money for publication, the

³⁶ Oscar Archiquette, "My Punishment for Being Honest," Sept. 25, 1939, O-60, OLFPP.

³⁷ Andrew Beechtree, untitled, Sept. 22, 1939, A-45, OLFPP.

³⁸ Ida Blackhawk to Floyd Lounsbury, "An Indian and a White Man Were Talking," undated, Z-18, OLFPP.

³⁹ William Skenandore to Andrew Beechtree, untitled, undated, A-30, OLFPP.

⁴⁰ Jonas Hill to Oscar Archiquette, untitled, Sept. 26, 1939, O-64, OLFPP.

⁴¹ Oscar Archiquette, "Indian Reorganization Act," undated, O-49, OLFPP.

⁴² U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record* 76th Cong., 1st sess. (March 27, 1939), 84, 3338-3342; (July 17, 1939), 84, 9111-9120; 76th Cong., 3rd sess. (Feb. 19, 1940), 86, 1574; (Aug. 24, 1940), 86, 10862-10863.

⁴³ Interview of Floyd Lounsbury, Nov. 16, 1978.

⁴⁴ For background on the Foreman project, see Elizabeth Williams Cosgrove, "The Grant Foreman Papers: Indian and Pioneer History," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 37 (Winter 1959-1960): pp. 507-510. For the ex-slave narratives, see Monty N. Penkower, *The Federal Writers' Project* (Urbana, Illinois, 1977), pp. 17-18, 146-154; and Norman Yerman, "The Background of the Slave Collection," *American Quarterly* 19 (Fall, 1967): pp. 535-553.

Oneidas put on one-act plays while the Northern Paper Mills Company of Green Bay Wisconsin donated the needed paper for the printing.⁴⁵ This revised hymnal, which is still used by the famous Oneida Singers today, is viewed by the Oneidas themselves as a major accomplishment of the project.⁴⁶

The project also influenced the direction of Iroquois scholarship. A vast body of linguistic data was accumulated on an Iroquoian language for the first time. Although Lounsbury was later to change the orthography,⁴⁷ his research and teaching virtually founded the contemporary interest in Iroquoian linguistics. The published hymnal and morphology are in themselves worthy monuments to the project, but beyond this, Lounsbury's example and approach dramatically changed the direction of Iroquois studies.⁴⁸

In assessing the significance of the Oneida Language and Folklore Project, it is important to note that the experiment was not designed to produce an overnight language turnaround at Oneida. Even by 1939, a large percentage of Oneidas had already lost

their language.⁴⁹ With the coming of war and in the postwar climate that followed, teaching Indians their own language became out of step again with American society's increasing emphasis on assimilation. Soon what had been accomplished, as was true in other WPA experiments, became a hazy memory. Even to the Oneidas, the preservation of language became less important than economic survival in the white man's world. The enthusiasm of Swadesh, Lounsbury, and Archiquette had to be recaptured and the country had to be reawakened to the old social consciousness of the 1930s. This new awareness was to be rekindled and was to result in another attempt at language restoration at Oneida in the 1970s.⁵⁰

In recalling the New Deal era, David Skenandore, the last surviving Oneida project member, summarized the community's attitudes toward the language and folklore experiment. He insisted: "It put bread on the table and we were glad to have a paying job."⁵¹ Earning a dollar attending school was an easier form of work relief than roadbuilding in the middle of the winter in Wisconsin. Quite significantly, the Oneida Language and Folklore Project provided enjoyment to a small group of Indians and gave them a sense of mission during the nation's worst depression. According to Skenandore: "We all realized that we were attempting to preserve and pass on the language for the future."⁵² In a significant way, that goal was achieved.

⁴⁵ Interview of Floyd Lounsbury, Nov. 16, 1978; Morris Swadesh, Floyd Lounsbury, Oscar Archiquette, *ONAYODA? AGÁ DEYE-LIHWAHIGSÁYA* (Oneida Hymnal) (Oneida, Wisconsin, 1941), preface.

⁴⁶ Interview (conducted by Laurence M. Hauptman) of Ruth Baird, Oct. 18, 1978, Green Bay, Wisconsin. Mrs. Baird is the current leader of the Oneida Singers.

⁴⁷ Interview of Floyd Lounsbury, Nov. 16, 1978.

⁴⁸ Floyd G. Lounsbury, "Oneida Verb Morphology," *Yale University Publications in Anthropology* 47 (New Haven, Conn., 1953). For a summary statement of Lounsbury's Iroquoian work, see his "Iroquoian Languages," in (Smithsonian) *Handbook of North American Indians*, William C. Sturtevant and Bruce G. Trigger, eds. (Washington, D.C., 1978), 15: pp. 334-343.

⁴⁹ Morris Swadesh, "Pattern Impact on Phonetics of Bilinguals," in *Language, Culture and Personality: Essays in Memory of Edward Sapir*, Leslie Spier, et al., eds. (Menasha, Wisconsin, 1941), p. 61.

⁵⁰ Interviews (conducted by Laurence M. Hauptman) of Loretta Webster and Clifford Abbott, Oct. 18, 1978, Oneida, Wisconsin. Mrs. Webster is the director of the Oneida language program today; Dr. Abbott, assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay and former student of Floyd Lounsbury, is a teacher in the program.

⁵¹ Interview of David Skenandore, Oct. 22, 1978.

⁵² *Ibid.*